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Arkansas's Top 25 GED Graduates Honored at State Capitol

LITTLE ROCK – The 25 highest scorers on the GED® Test in Arkansas were honored on May 8 at a ceremony in the old Supreme Court Chambers at the Arkansas State Capitol.

"The awards ceremony was a very special event for Adult Education in Arkansas because the top 25 GED scorers in Arkansas for 2011 were recognized for their outstanding accomplishments," said Department of Career Education GED Program Manager Janice Hanlon. "In 2011, 8,375 individuals took the test and 7,129 passed which reflects an 85 percent pass rate in Arkansas. The national rate stands at about 70 percent. Our adult education centers throughout the state do an excellent job preparing students for the tests."

"During the last 12 years, about 80,000 Arkansans have earned a GED," said James H. Smith, Jr., Deputy Director of the Adult Education Division of the Arkansas Department of Career Education as he addressed the graduates. "Each year we've honored those in the top 25 spots. That means you are among an elite group of just 300 out of 80,000. You have a lot to be proud of."

Ninety-seven percent of colleges accept GED credentials for undergraduate admission, and a recent survey showed that 95 percent of employers viewed the credential positively in corporate hiring. All 50 states use GED tests to measure the academic knowledge and award equivalency diplomas to residents who did not complete high school. Arkansas is one of only a few states nationwide that does not charge a fee to take the GED tests.

"People of all ages take the GED tests," said Hanlon. "Last year, we had 35 Arkansans 60 years old or older to take the GED. Anyone who passes the test is awarded an Arkansas High School Diploma. We are very proud of the individuals we are honoring."

The following are all the members of the top 25, in descending order, who granted permission to release their information, listed with their city and the adult education center where they prepared for the tests:

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- Nicolas LeFevre of Conway - Conway Adult Education Center
- Ashton Sorrels of Russellville - Russellville Adult Education Center
- Ethan Cole McDaniel of Conway - Conway Adult Education Center
- Devin Matthews of Drasco - ASU Searcy Adult Education Center
- James Wynne of Conway - Conway Adult Education Center
- Jacob Schneider of Rogers - Shorter College
- William Richardson of Pocahontas - Texarkana Adult Education Center
- Shannan Lovett of West Memphis - Mid South Community College Adult Education Center
- Elizabeth O'Kelly of Siloam Springs - NorthWest Arkansas Community College Adult Education Center
- Michelle Ellington-Burns of Greenbrier -Conway Adult Education Center
- Hannah Baxter of Fayetteville - Fayetteville Adult Education Center
- Katelynn Bragg of Jonesboro - Valley View Adult Education Center
- Ashley Walker of Clarksville - Clarksville/Johnson County Adult Education Center
- Brandy Toler of Green Forest -North Arkansas College Adult Education Center
- Shane Peaks of Russellville - Russellville Adult Education Center
- Cassaundra Shutts of Mountain Home - ASU Mountain Home Adult Education Center
- Kelsey Miles of Benton - Saline County Adult Education Center

The highest possible average score on the GED tests is 800. In 2011 the 25 highest scores in Arkansas ranged from 778 to 722.

The battery of GED® tests and the method by which they are administered are undergoing significant changes nationally that will affect the tests in Arkansas starting in 2014. The content of the GED tests themselves will be updated to align with the common core educational standards required in traditional high school education and the tests will be given solely on computer. In addition, it is very likely the GED® tests will no longer be free in Arkansas after January 1, 2014.

Anyone who has taken part of the current test battery but not earned their GED diploma is encouraged to finish this effort before the change in 2014. At that point, students will be required to begin the process with the new test; prior testing will not be credited toward earning the new 2014 GED® diploma.

There are 61 adult education centers in Arkansas where GED® classes and testing are provided free of charge. A directory of centers is available under the "Adult Education" tab on the website of the Arkansas Department of Career Education (<http://ace.arkansas.gov>) or by calling (501) 682-1980.

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Group photo after the ceremony (left to right): James Smith, Deputy Director for Adult Education; Shane Peaks, Russellville; Dr. Trenia Miles, Associate Director for Adult Education; Ethan Cole McDaniel, Conway; Cassaundra Shutts, Mountain Home; Janice Hanlon, Arkansas GED Administrator; Ashley Walker, Clarksville; Shannon Lovett, West Memphis; Brandy Toler, Green Forest; Katelynn Bragg, Jonesboro; Elizabeth O'Kelley, Siloam Springs; Michelle Ellington-Burns, Greenbrier; Jacob Schneider, Rogers and Devin Matthews, Drasco.

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